



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF
MENTAL HEALTH, MENTAL RETARDATION AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

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October 24, 2002

For Immediate Release

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HOW TO TALK TO CHILDREN ABOUT THE SNIPER ATTACKS

VIRGINIA--Experts encourage parents and teachers to talk to children about their feelings about the recent sniper attacks. This is especially important now, as our children have been so directly impacted by the restrictions placed on them for so many of the outdoor and extracurricular activities. Children want to know why and what is going on.

To help parents and teachers, the Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services offers the tips below, extracted from the Center for Mental Health Services website.

- Provide children with opportunities to talk about what they are seeing on television and to ask questions.
- Don't be afraid to admit that you can't answer all their questions.
- Answer questions at a level the child can understand.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for children to talk. They will probably have more questions as time goes on.
- Use this as an opportunity to establish a family emergency plan. Feeling that there is something you can do may be very comforting to both children and adults.
- Allow children to discuss other fears and concerns about unrelated issues. This is a good opportunity to explore these issues also.
- Monitor children's television watching. Some parents may wish to limit their child's exposure to graphic or troubling scenes. To the extent possible, watch reports of the event with children. It is at these times that questions might arise.
- Help children understand that there are no bad emotions and that a wide range of reactions is normal. Encourage children to express their feelings to adults (including teachers and parents) who can help them understand their sometimes strong and troubling emotions.

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- Try not to focus on blame.
- In addition to the tragic things they see, help children identify good things, such as heroic actions.

Teachers also can help children through art and play activities, as well as by encouraging group discussions in the classroom and informational presentations about the event.

For help with reactions to the recent sniper attacks, call the Community Resilience Project of Northern Virginia toll free at 1-866-400-2951 (TTY: 703-228-4831) or visit www.communityresilience.com or www.dmhmrzas.state.va.us for information.

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Through a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services administers the Community Resilience Project of Northern Virginia with the Community Services Boards of the counties of Arlington, Fairfax, and Loudoun, and the city of Alexandria. The free services available through the Community Resilience Project include individual and group counseling, support groups, stress management, emergency preparedness, dealing with grief and loss, children and trauma, county services referrals, and financial or economic guidance. Services are also available to the hearing impaired. The services available through this project, established for those in the City of Alexandria and the counties of Arlington, Fairfax/Falls Church, and Loudoun who were directly and indirectly impacted by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, are available for people in these areas who have been impacted by the sniper attacks.